



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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INTERIOR SECRETARY WATT ANNOUNCES HUGE ADDITION TO ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Nearly 1.3 million acres will be added to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) through a donation by the State of Alaska, Interior Secretary James Watt announced today. The Secretary used the authority of the Alaska Lands Act of 1980 to add this land to the refuge. It is the largest single addition of non-Federal lands ever made to a national wildlife refuge, Watt said.

This action also caps a series of unprecedented additions to the Federal conservation estate. In 34 months under Watt's direction, the Department has added over 1.6 million acres of non-Federal lands to the National Park and Refuge systems.

The acquisitions in 1983 alone exceed those made by the previous Administration in its four-year tenure. In fact, no prior Administration has acquired as much land in a single year for the Federal estate since Alaska was purchased in 1867.

The remote tract of land in the heart of the Arctic refuge is important wildlife habitat. Its greatest significance is for the 100,000-animal Porcupine caribou herd, which crosses the area during its migration from calving grounds in the northern Arctic refuge to more southern wintering areas in Canada.

"I am particularly pleased to protect this important wildlife area," Watt said. "The addition of this land to the National Wildlife Refuge System will help us meet our international responsibilities for managing and conserving the Porcupine caribou herd."

(more)

Alaska originally selected the lands under the Alaska Statehood Act to accommodate a possible gas pipeline corridor. That pipeline proposal is no longer under active consideration. Recognizing the important wildlife values of the area, the State has relinquished its selection of the area -- at the Secretary's request -- with the understanding that the land would become part of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Previous Administrations had sought unsuccessfully to add this area to ANWR.

Most of the 1.3-million-acre area will be added to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge immediately. However, Congressional approval is required to add a 325,000-acre portion of the area that is legally under the jurisdiction of the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management. Watt said the Interior Department would proceed quickly to seek that Congressional approval.

The huge block of land is bordered by the Arctic refuge on three sides and by Canada on the fourth. It lies on the south slope of the Brooks Range, and the Coleen and Sheenjek Rivers flow through it. Its spruce-hardwood forests, treeless bogs, and tundra support a wide variety of fish and wildlife, including the endangered American peregrine falcon, moose, Dall sheep, wolf, and brown bear.

ANWR is the second largest national wildlife refuge, totalling nearly 19.3 million acres with the addition of these lands. There are now more than 90 million acres in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

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